

ABC'S OF FALSE TEACHING

BILL RUDGE



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Introduction

The times in which we live demand safeguards from unscriptural teachings and phenomena. This practical and easy-to-understand guide from A to Z will help you recognize the characteristics of false and extreme groups. Using every letter of the alphabet, learn how to identify whether a belief or practice is biblical or not. Acquire biblical truth and develop discernment to know whether a belief or practice is of God. This “Awareness Alphabet” makes a difficult subject as easy as ABC. Be biblically certain that you are not being led astray by false doctrines, unscriptural teachings, false prophets, or counterfeit signs and wonders.

Absolute Authority

There are groups which replace the authority of God and the Bible with that of a human leader. Claiming to be God's representative, the leader demands total submission. Guilt and fear are usually the clubs used to compel obedience by implying that those who do not submit to the human leader are in rebellion against God. Some groups use humiliation, intimidation, or threats of violence to control devotees or prevent them from leaving.

While it is true that we are to submit to those in legitimate authority (Hebrews 13:17), we are not to obey anyone who commands us to do something contrary to God's Word (Acts 5:29). Christian leaders should not be overbearing or lord it over those entrusted by God to their care:

Shepherd the flock of God among you [under your care], exercising oversight [watching over them] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid [shameful] gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over [domineering] those allotted [entrusted] to your charge [care], but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3).

So, beware of any group whose leaders use manipulation and coercion to gain authority or maintain dominance over their followers.

Balance Upset

While some of the controls I warn of in this book can be exercised by legitimate churches or movements, it is when they are taken to unscriptural extremes that they become hazardous to our well-being and impede our relationship with Christ. Balance is a key principle for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

Some groups start out with seemingly sound teachings and good intentions, but get off-track when they get out of biblical balance. This happens primarily when study is limited to only those scriptures which pertain to the topics they are interested in, instead of studying all of Scripture *in context*. They find isolated verses that appear to agree with what they already believe, while ignoring scriptures that may add additional light or even contradict their preconceived ideas.

Be careful of any person or group who drifts from biblical balance to extremes in their teachings or practices. Always study Scripture in context by reading the verses before and after so you can correctly discern the word of truth:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Complete Control

Most false prophets and teachers are great manipulators. They coerce you into interpreting Scripture as they do and accepting their beliefs and lifestyle. They will often attempt to control every aspect of your life—time, relationships, and money—for their own selfish purposes. Many will want to oversee almost every decision you make: their desire is for total mastery over their devotees.

The Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians for allowing this to happen to them. He said:

For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself... (2 Corinthians 11:20).

Do not allow anyone to manipulate and control your life. Jesus Christ is the only One to whom we should totally surrender and submit. Everything we do should be for His honor and glory, not that of human leaders.

Deception

Many false groups conceal their true identity, deliberately deceiving outsiders and new members regarding their real beliefs and goals. Only when new adherents have established a commitment to the group and are indoctrinated, do they reveal their actual beliefs.

Matthew 7:15 states:

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 reveals:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

1 Timothy 4:1 warns:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

2 Timothy 3:13 makes known that:

Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

In these days of widespread spiritual deception, it is of utmost importance that believers test every teaching, technique, phenomenon, practice, involvement, and movement by the standard of Holy Scripture.

Emphasis on Experience

Experience-oriented people allow phenomena to determine their beliefs rather than evaluate mystical experiences by the Word of God. As a result they lack spiritual discernment, making them easy victims for deception. There is nothing wrong with feelings, emotions, and excitement; these can be valid responses to the genuine moving of God's Spirit. Besides, we are not to quench the Spirit who desires to work in our lives in real and special ways. The danger arises when people seek experiences, miracles, signs, and revelations more than they seek the Lord and His Word, or hold them in higher esteem.

The phenomena that occur or one's feeling are not the scriptural criteria for evaluating whether someone or something is of God. Just because the Bible is used or the name of Jesus is mentioned does not mean that everything that happens is from Him. I have researched and attended many occult and New Age meetings where they quoted the Bible, talked about Jesus, and seemingly, even praised His name.

Matthew 24:24 warns that the deception in the last days will be great because "false christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders [attesting miracles], so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." Revelation 13:13-14 reveals that the False Prophet will perform great signs, even making fire come down from heaven in front of people, deceiving those who dwell on the earth because of the signs he performs. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-9 discloses that the coming of the lawless one [Antichrist] will be "in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders."

Do not be deceived by allowing mere subjective experiences to regulate your beliefs. Instead, let the objective Word of God be the final authority by which you evaluate all phenomena, practices, prophecies, signs, and wonders.

False Salvation

The Gospel message of God's grace and salvation through faith in Christ is often replaced with the false gospel of works and rituals: you have to join their group, follow the proper rituals, witness, give money, chant, meditate, or do something to assist and ensure your salvation. In many cases, their true motivation is not for saving souls, but enslaving souls.

Then there are those who teach that we are all divine: this is the same lie Satan used in the Garden of Eden, "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). According to adherents of this persuasion, humankind is not separated from God because of sin and rebellion and therefore in need of salvation. Instead, they teach that the goal of every person is to realize their divinity. Their desire is to exalt self to the status of God rather than to humble themselves before God and receive His mercy and grace.

1 John 1:8 says:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 offers God's solution to our sin dilemma:

He made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

There is nothing more tragic than someone pursuing a false hope of salvation through their own self-effort and works when Jesus Christ offers this as a gift. Romans 5:1 affirms:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God Portrayed as Impersonal

God is often described as an ambiguous, impersonal force—especially by those influenced by Eastern and New Age spirituality. To them, God is whatever you conceive Him to be. They believe that God and His creation are, in reality, the same. By adhering to proper beliefs and formulas we can all achieve oneness with the universe and obtain Christ-consciousness.

In contrast, the Bible presents a very real and very personal God whose existence and identity are separate from His creation. He possesses all the attributes of personality: He lives, feels, plans, loves, grieves, blesses, punishes, and forgives. The God of the Bible is revealed as omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, unchanging, transcendent, triune, good, kind, compassionate, patient, long-suffering, merciful, faithful, righteous, just, and holy.

One reason many non-Christians portray deity as impersonal is in the hope that they will not have to stand before God on Judgment Day, thereby absolving themselves of any responsibility or accountability they may have before a personal Creator. However, Scripture emphatically declares:

We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, “AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.” So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:10-12).

Hazards to Discernment

Although it would be wonderful if every person who comes in the name of Christ would truly be of God, the Bible clearly reveals that this is not the case. Our enemy is often disguised as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and his cohorts as servants of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:15).

The Apostle Jude writes:

For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord (Jude 4, NIV).

The Apostle Paul warned:

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

Some of the ways the enemy attempts to seduce believers from pure devotion to Christ is through incorrect teachings, untrue beliefs, inaccurate prophecies, pseudo-phenomena, spurious signs, counterfeit miracles, occult practices, and New Age techniques. Therefore, one of the greatest needs today is for spiritual discernment. The only way to have discernment is to be familiar with God's Word and to know the voice of His Spirit. And the only way to be familiar with God's Word and know His voice is to spend quality time in Scripture and prayer.

Intensive Indoctrination

Many false and extreme groups use intensive indoctrination to “program” new devotees. Extensive time is given to repetitive messages, singing, praising, dancing, chanting, and other emotionally driven and consciousness-altering activities. Little time is allowed to think or reflect on one’s own. New followers are told that only the leader has special insight and revelation-knowledge from God to interpret Scripture correctly. Thus, their interpretation is the only one allowed to be taught to devotees.

Everything that initiates once believed is gradually undermined and then replaced with the leader’s own philosophy. Soon devotees believe and do things they would have never imagined before or even thought possible. To keep members away from information that might cause them to question the group’s teachings, they are encouraged, or required, to avoid reading, listening to, or watching anything that is not produced or endorsed by their movement. They are also often forbidden to fellowship with anyone not sanctioned by the leader.

Be cautious of any group that only allows the teachings of those with whom they are associated! Also, be on guard around anyone who attempts to create a mystical atmosphere to induce a hypnotic state or who uses mind-altering techniques to affect a trance-like state. Never allow yourself to be indoctrinated or programmed with deceptive or erroneous beliefs and practices.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

Jesus Is Minimized

Satan will give you nine truths to get one lie across. The lie he desires to propagate is designed either to make you think you do not need to accept Jesus Christ or to cause you to follow “another Jesus” than the Jesus of the Bible. 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 says:

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

Some pseudo-religious groups lower Jesus to merely a great teacher or prophet. Others believe we all have the potential to become a christ. One of the surest tests for any questionable person or group is to discover who they really believe Jesus Christ is. This is crucial because Jesus said:

Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins (John 8:24).

1 John 2:22-23 states in strong words:

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

1 John 4:1-3 clearly cautions:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Any person who denies that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, God

incarnate, and the only way of salvation is scripturally identified as a false prophet or a false teacher.

Knowledge Kept Shallow

The easiest targets for errant leaders are the undiscerning believers who are immature in their faith and have a shallow knowledge of the Word of God. They keep their followers both ignorant of God's Word and under their control by prohibiting them to study Scripture on their own, convincing them they cannot properly interpret the Bible for themselves. Another method used is to elevate something else (usually their teachings) as equal or superior to Scripture.

Although not every Christian is called to be expert in false teachings and how people are diverted from the Truth, every believer must study to be expert in the Word of God. Then if someone takes verses out of context, adds to or subtracts from, misinterprets, twists, or distorts the Word to make it conform to his or her own ideas, you can examine those scriptures in context. Likewise, if someone seeks to persuade you to participate in a practice that violates the leading of God's Spirit in your life, you will know either a Bible verse or principle as a confirming witness to not get involved.

When studying a biblical text, always read the verses before and after. Examine related scriptures that may provide additional insight on the topic being discussed, and study the historical background.

2 Timothy 2:15 directs us:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

We are to be spiritually mature so that according to Ephesians 4:14:

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.

Colossians 2:6-7 exhorts us:

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

Be like the Bereans who received the Word with great eagerness, examining the scriptures daily, to see if what was said was true (Acts 17:11).

Love and Sex Are Distorted

Many false groups use outward displays of superficial love and concern to attract members. They want to impress upon you that they love you. However, their affection dissolves if you question or oppose their teachings or if you leave the group. Many such groups also depart from biblical guidelines regarding their views on sex: either they forbid or try to limit sexual desire and relations of married couples or else they encourage promiscuity and unnatural behavior.

Some groups pervert Acts 2:44 concerning having “all things in common,” and wrongly interpret this verse to mean that members should share everything—even sex. Sexual immorality is tolerated under the guise that meeting someone’s physical needs is acceptable in God’s eyes. To justify this erroneous perspective they resort to human “wisdom” rather than obeying God’s clear revelation in Scripture. The Apostle Peter strongly warns about perverted false prophets and teachers who seduce their adherents into sexual impurity. He states:

Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned... They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children... For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved (2 Peter 2:2-19).

Be wary of any person (whether he or she is called pastor, prophet, apostle, bishop) who distorts or perverts scriptural standards and guidelines regarding sex and marriage. In contrast, the aim of every true believer is to share the genuine love of Christ with the lonely, hurting, and unloved. When someone experiences the authentic love of God, they will be far less vulnerable to the seductive lure of a counterfeit or enslaving love.

Motives that Are Selfish

We must all examine our own motives and those of spiritual leaders who influence us. What are the motives for the things we do and say or the ministry we have? Is it merely to receive the praise of people, obtain personal gain, and build our own kingdom? Or is it truly for the glory of God—a sacrifice of our life in service to the Lord—and to advance His Kingdom?

Initially, many false teachers seem to have a true heart for the Lord, but somehow pride and a lust for power corrupts them. Like Satan, their fall is the fruit of self-glorification. John the Baptist said concerning Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Too often that is reversed. More emphasis is placed on the human leader and less is put on Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:5-8 gives us a perfect example of proper heart motives:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

As a result of Christ’s humility and obedience, Philippians 2:9-11 goes on to say:

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So beware of leaders who exploit you with flattery, exhibit constant self-centeredness, or impose their own will rather than the Lord’s. Beware of those who boast about their “gifts of the Spirit” but manifest little “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). Be cautious of those who praise Jesus with their mouths but whose hearts are far away (Isaiah 29:13). Be on your guard for those who profess humility but whose recurring arrogance reveals a desire for self-exaltation.

Not Everyone Who Says to Me, “Lord, Lord”

In chapter 7 of the Gospel of Matthew, verses 21-23, Jesus makes one of the most startling statements in Scripture:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

These people called Jesus, “Lord.” They claimed to have prophesied in His name and performed miracles in His name and cast out demons in His name, but they did not *know* Him and do the will of His Father. Alleged miracles and supernatural phenomena are not the criteria for receiving Christ’s approval or demonstrating the required obedience for entering His eternal kingdom.

While I believe in God’s supernatural power, what is more important than miracles and spectacular phenomena is that you know the Jesus of the Bible in a real and personal way. That He is truly Lord of your life. That you are walking in obedience to His Word and Spirit. That the fruit of the Spirit is being developed in your life as you are being conformed to His image. That your heart’s desire is to exalt Him. That you are bearing fruit for His glory.

Only True Ones

Once a group departs from the accepted standard of Scripture and begins to develop the idea that they are the one true representative of God, be careful. It is common for a rogue leader to adopt the belief that his or her group is the ONLY one that has the complete revelation of truth. Followers are taught that those outside their movement are inferior, unspiritual, heretics, or infidels. This attitude of superiority and spiritual elitism creates a divisive mentality of “we are more spiritual; they are less spiritual.” Taken to an extreme, it breeds oppression and persecution.

In contrast, Romans 12:3-6 says:

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly....

While the Gospel is exclusive of those who reject faith in Jesus Christ, it is inclusive of all true believers, regardless of denominational preference.

The Apostle Paul teaches about the body of Christ:

But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Corinthians 12:20-26).

Be leery of anyone who says they are the only true church or implies that

they are superior or more spiritual than all others. This causes division and weakens the true body of Christ, and has led many astray. Romans 16:17 warns:

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions [divisions] and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

Prophecies that Don't Come True

Acts 2:17 (NKJV) states:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days,” says God, “that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.”

We are living in the end times and God is pouring out His Spirit. However, for every authentic gift that God gives, Satan attempts a counterfeit and people try to imitate. That is why there is an ever increasing number of false prophecies and revelations that are either satanically inspired or given by those who speak from their own imagination.

The Spirit of God exalts Jesus and strengthens, edifies, and encourages the body of Christ. The counterfeit and the imitation may, on the surface, appear to be legitimate and to honor Jesus, but eventually the focus is placed on someone or something else. Ultimately these human (or demonically) inspired prophecies and revelations cause confusion and chaos in the lives and ministries of those who were undiscerning and foolish enough to accept them.

Jeremiah 5:30-31 tells it like it is:

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so!

Jeremiah 14:14 provides another timely warning:

Then the LORD said to me, “The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.”

Ezekiel 33:33 announces:

So when it comes to pass—as surely it will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 gives a balanced perspective on prophecy:

Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, a message has been given that the Lord has not spoken (Deuteronomy 18:22)! Even if what a prophet says does come true, if he or she seeks to lead you away from the Lord your God or twists His Word, do not follow that prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

All who claim to have a dream, vision, or word from the Lord that does not come to pass need to repent and publicly acknowledge it; no excuses or twisting of words and circumstances—just repent and acknowledge! (See 1 Kings 22:1-40 for a biblical example of the difference between false prophets and true prophets of God.)

Many prophecies are being given by supposed prophets. The following are some questions to ask yourself about each and every “prophecy” (and “prophet”); then seriously consider the answers:

- Does the Holy Spirit and God’s Word bear witness to the truth of the prophecy?
- Is the messenger living an obedient God-honoring life?
- Is it truly drawing me closer to the Jesus Christ of Scripture?
- Is it consistent with God’s Word and biblically accurate?
- Is it giving me a desire to study God’s Word even more?
- Is it growing in me a passion to witness and lead others to faith in Jesus Christ?
- Am I obedient to the biblical principle of not quenching the Spirit or despising prophecies, but examining everything carefully and holding fast to that which is good?
- If it is a futuristic prophecy, is it in harmony with biblical end-time prophecy?
- Does it prepare the true Church for the prophesied coming apostasy and false unity movement, the persecution and Tribulation period—following the rapture—before the glorious second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?
- Again, does it stir my spirit to faithfully serve Jesus Christ and share the Gospel with those who have not yet accepted Him?

Do not accept as genuine a prophecy or revelation from anyone unless it is in exact accord with God’s Word, is one hundred percent accurate, confirms what

the Spirit has already spoken to your heart, and truly exalts the Jesus of the Bible.

Never accept anyone's prophecies and revelations as a higher authority than the Bible itself or make anyone other than Jesus Christ the director of your life. Do not run to purported prophets for quick advice. Instead, diligently study God's Word for guidance and pray and fast as you seek Him and His will. Then obediently follow the instructions of Scripture and what His Spirit speaks to your heart.

Questionable Finances

Many dishonest people will use manipulation, coercion, and deceit to get your money. They may lie about what group they really represent, what their true beliefs are, or how the money will actually be used. The leaders frequently live in opulence which is made possible by followers who sacrificially give of their resources and/or exist in meager conditions of servitude.

There are cultic groups who compel members to surrender all of their finances and possessions. While most groups may not go this far, some encourage adherents to give multiple tithes or to take out loans and give them the money. Healings or special blessings are often promised to those who give generous and sacrificial donations, but are withheld from those who don't.

Some groups merchandise the Gospel by charging exorbitant prices for their services and resources. Others use deceptive and fraudulent fundraising gimmicks. All such approaches are a disgrace to the cause of Christ and contrary to the example set by Jesus and His true disciples.

2 Peter 2:2-3 accurately warned almost two thousand years ago that:

Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:17 (NIV):

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

Do not be victimized by those who use God's name merely for personal gain and to feed their own fleshly desires. No matter how pleasant they seem, what noble cause they say it is for, or how heart-wrenching their story, do not donate unless you know who they are, what they believe, and how your money will be used. Be certain of their integrity and that they will be good stewards of the finances you entrust to them.

Rituals that Are Secretive

Obviously, both knowledge and abilities were lost in the Garden of Eden after the Fall. However, it is foolish and dangerous to endeavor through occult means to retrieve that which was banned by God. We must patiently wait until the coming of Jesus Christ for God to restore the full potential (knowledge, abilities) for which He created human beings.

The Apostle John encourages us:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

Nevertheless, people are fascinated by anyone who claims to have clandestine knowledge or powers, and they are willing to pay almost any price to discover their secret. That is why so many false teachers perform mysterious initiation rituals, use covert codes and formulas, and have inner-circle teachings—all of which are denied to outsiders. Members believe that through esoteric teachings and mystical experiences they will discover hidden knowledge and obtain powers available only to those who join the group, learn the mysterious rites, and master secret techniques and teachings.

In contrast, Jesus said:

I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret (John 18:20).

The Apostle Paul likewise stated:

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20).

It was Paul who was called by God to:

bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:9-11).

May your hearts “be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3).

Nothing concealed or revealed in this universe is ever going to rival God’s wonderful mystery made known in the Gospel, namely, that salvation is available to both Jews and Gentiles through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:6). In all of creation there is nothing that even remotely compares to God’s surpassing revelation of truth in Christ. There is no deeper knowledge, greater wisdom, or richer spiritual blessing than that which is found in Jesus Christ. Why settle for something inferior when you can have the very best?

Be sure to keep away from individuals or groups who offer private inner-circle teachings and practices, perform secretive rituals and ceremonies, or claim to possess hidden knowledge and powers. Instead, embrace Jesus Christ and Biblical Christianity which are OPENLY and FREELY offered in God’s Word and by His Spirit.

Separation from the World

Many groups teach devotees to renounce the world and break all ties with their past. They isolate members from family and friends who are not associated with the movement. While the follower may think this is a spiritual act of separation, the real advantage for the leader is that it makes it harder, if not impossible, for members to leave the group. Some do not go so far as to require literal separation from society. Members still live and work in the community, but are forbidden to associate with anyone not affiliated with their movement. They are also encouraged to have access only to study materials produced or endorsed by their group.

While it is true that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19) and believers are told not to love the world or be conformed to it (1 John 2:15; Romans 12:2), we are not to shun outsiders. Although Jesus and His disciples separated themselves from the sins and influences of the world, they were not isolated from the people in the world. Instead, they went to where the hurting and dying were to minister to them.

Jesus commanded His disciples to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). Believers are also instructed to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). We do this by handling ourselves with dignity and integrity in the midst of a perverse generation. We are to be living witnesses to the people we meet every day.

It is wise not to associate or fellowship with someone who undermines your faith in Christ or to be a companion with a professing Christian who is living an immoral life, as it may taint your testimony. The Apostle Paul provides a balance in this biblical principle of separation from the world but *not* isolation from sinners:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; I did not at all mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

As believers in Jesus Christ we are not to avoid contact with the unsaved in this world—how else can we share His love and truth with them? However, we must not participate in activities with them that comprise our commitment to Christ and His Word or tolerate sin in the church by associating with professing

believers who unrepentantly persist in a lifestyle that dishonors Christ.

Techniques that Are Unbiblical

Some false teachers claim to know techniques that will help devotees achieve inner tranquility, tap latent powers of their mind, manipulate impersonal energy forces, enjoy mystical experiences, or have euphoric encounters with angels or God.

Mind-body and psycho-spiritual techniques such as imagery, visualization, centering, inner healing, therapeutic touch, toning, hypnosis, yoga, meditation, positive confession, and so on are growing in popularity. They have replaced the genuine transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of many undiscerning Christians. A thorough examination will reveal that most of these practices and philosophies are not only contrary to Scripture but rooted in occultism and New Age spirituality.

Scripture admonishes you to keep your mind on guard and to take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). You are to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). God’s ultimate purpose for your life is to be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). Those who refuse to implement the scriptural principles for spiritual growth such as repentance, obedience, commitment, discipline, self-control, and perseverance, which are the fruit produced through diligent Bible study and prayer, are quick to resort to imitation and counterfeit methods.

Beware of anyone who encourages you to participate in techniques or rituals that violate biblical principles. Do not submit to techniques which put you in a passive or consciousness-altering mental state.

Unity of Religion

A growing number of people today believe that all religions are basically the same. It does not matter what God you believe in, as long as you are sincere in your beliefs. However, the Bible indicates the distinct possibility of being sincerely wrong. The intensity of one's faith is not what matters most, but who and what a person believes in.

Biblical Christianity has historical, archaeological, and prophetic evidence to validate its unique claims. That is why, when Christians say that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, we are not being dogmatic or narrow-minded, we are being truthful. While there may be numerous denominations with different emphases on various ways to serve Him, there is only one way to the Father, and that is through His Son.

If the Bible indicated that there was any other way than through faith in Jesus Christ, then we would be obligated to tell you. Instead, John 14:6 records Jesus' words:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Acts 4:12 states:

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 says:

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

1 John 5:11-12 confirms:

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

In spite of apparent differences, all false groups have similar foundational beliefs, indicating they all come from the same source. And they all have the

same fundamental flaw—an outright rejection or flagrant distortion of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. Is it any wonder when one realizes that Satan, the god of this world, is the author of every pseudo-religious group and teaching?

The Apostle Paul wrote:

And even if our gospel is veiled [hidden], it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

For millennia, false prophets, false teachers, and false christs have merely been preparing the way for Satan's ultimate deception. On the not-too-distant horizon lurks the temporary reign of the Antichrist, who will join political power, economic control, and religious worship into a unified system of *delusion*. There is no doubt that *Mystery Babylon*, with all her immorality and sorceries, will be reborn during the Tribulation period before the second coming of Jesus Christ. The foreboding winds of global government, a one-world economy, and a prejudiced religious system (tolerating virtually anything but true Christianity) are blowing across America and the world.

While God desires that all believers in Christ "attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:13), He forbids us to unite with the spirit of Antichrist and to adopt beliefs or participate in practices that compromise our commitment to Jesus Christ and His Word.

Victors to Victims

A sad reality is that many false teachers once seemed to have a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, but somehow pride and a lust for power, pleasure, money, and other desires of this world overtook them. For some, addiction overcame them and changed them from being conquerors to being victimized by vices.

Initially, false leaders promise to lead their followers to great conquests and blessings. The reality is that they are eventually led to disappointment, disillusionment, and destruction. Being blocked or persuaded from truly living for the Jesus of the Bible, the followers end up as their leaders: victims rather than victors.

Scripture clearly proclaims that false teachers, false prophets, false christs, and ultimately the Antichrist himself will have their temporary season of deception and dominance. The Bible informs us that the Antichrist “opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). However, “the Lord will slay him with the breath of His mouth and bring [him] to an end by the appearance of His coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:8). The Bible clearly reveals this inevitable and complete victory of Christ and His true followers:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.” And I saw the beast [Antichrist] and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and

against His army. And the beast [Antichrist] was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh (Revelation 19:11-21).

The time is rapidly approaching when the kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15)! True believers in Christ will rule and reign with Him for eternity and will inherit all that God has prepared for those who love Him (Revelation 21:7). As believers in Jesus Christ we can be victorious—not only when He returns—but as we faithfully serve Him now and until He comes.

2 Corinthians 2:14 says:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.

2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV) tells us that:

God has not given us a spirit of fear [cowardice], but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

1 John 5:4-5 (NIV) declares:

Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 4:4 states:

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

Romans 8:31-39 proclaims:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or

distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Willingly Rejecting the Truth

So *many* people have become enslaved by deception and delusion! While some may eventually break the chains and escape, others will never be free from the mental and spiritual bondage of their delusion. The sad reality for many people who choose to join a pseudo-religious group is that their decision can be irreversible.

We may feel sorry for those ensnared and wonder why God allowed them to be deceived in the first place or why He does not set them free. However, most of these people had ample opportunities to come to “the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4) but “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). They have helped fulfill 2 Timothy 4:3-4:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

2 Thessalonians 2:10-11 unhappily informs us that they:

perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false.

While we are to pray for and witness to those ensnared in false teaching, we also must realize that some of these people have knowingly and willingly rejected the truth and sound doctrine. We should continue to show Christ’s love and intercede with God for them but we must not give place to the error they proclaim. By God’s grace, some will have their eyes opened and see the light of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Xtra-Biblical Revelations

Many a false teacher has claimed to be the chosen vessel through whom God makes known a new *truth*—something which was previously not fully disclosed. Although they say their new revelation—or their new interpretation of Scripture—is intended to shed additional light on what God has already revealed, in reality, it adds to, subtracts from, or distorts the Bible. Ultimately, these extra-biblical revelations are given greater authority and preeminence over the Bible.

With no credible evidence to prove that their new revelation was divinely inspired, they want us to abandon previously held beliefs and embrace their erroneous ideas. It is interesting that most who have received alleged “new revelations,” have acknowledged that they received them during visitations by “angelic beings,” spirits of the dead, or even Christ Himself. A look behind the scenes often reveals a definite association and contact with demonic beings who frequently masquerade as messengers of God.

Now realize, a cultic leader who is attempting to gain followers for his or her “new revelation” is usually not so naive as to immediately attempt to persuade “Christians” to accept their unbiblical ideas and beliefs. Instead, they will give some general truths that almost everyone can agree with, and they talk about God, Christ, the Bible, miracles, and so on. The immature and unsuspecting listener is impressed! Very subtly the cultist reveals their “new revelation” of false doctrine mixed with just enough truth to keep the unsuspecting off-guard. Finally, the leader reveals that his true allegiance is to some book or teaching other than the Bible and someone other than Jesus Christ.

False prophets and false teachers are usually successful in offering their new truth to those who have little of the old truth. In reality, their message is not new at all. Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 states:

That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, “See this, it is new”? Already it has existed for ages which were before us.

Although they claim to have God’s new revelation for the world, it is really just new names and disguises for Satan’s old methods of seducing people away from pure devotion to the God of the Bible and His revealed truth in Jesus Christ.

At a time when deception is so rampant in these last days and many New Age messiahs and prophets are attempting to gain followers for their new revelations, it is essential to consider the warning of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1:6-8:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

You Can Tell the Difference

Multitudes of people today seem eager to accept a spiritual counterfeit. The world's spiritual climate is ripe for the one who will be the very incarnation of Satan and who—through false signs and wonders—will temporarily deceive the world into believing that he is the promised Messiah and savior of the world. Considering this great delusion, you may wonder how we can know who the true Christ is. In John 20:27, Jesus said to Thomas who doubted that Jesus really rose from the dead:

Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.

Hebrews 9:22 distinctly states God's requirement for the absolution from sin:

...without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Instead of shedding their blood for their followers, most of the false prophets and teachers live in wanton pleasure and luxury while their followers are the ones who sacrifice and practice self-denial.

Only Jesus Christ has gone to the cross, shed His blood, and risen from the dead. It is by His blood that forgiveness and a restored relationship with the Father is made possible. Only Jesus Christ is our perfect sacrifice to obtain pardon from a holy and just God. That is why John the Baptist identified Jesus as:

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

1 Peter 3:18 tells us:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says:

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Not only is Jesus Christ our unique and only sacrifice for sin, but when He returns, the biblical evidence, cataclysmic signs, and physical transformation of believers will undeniably confirm Him to be the true Messiah.

Revelation 1:7 foretells:

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

In Acts 1:11, as Jesus ascended to heaven, two angels said to the disciples:

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.

Matthew 24:27-31 says:

For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Daniel 7:13-14 says:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 reveals that when Christ returns believers will be transformed:

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be

changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 states:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Zeal Misdirected

Many false groups are characterized by a zeal that is often astounding. The members follow their leader with tremendous enthusiasm and energy, doing whatever they are told to do without hesitation or question. Zeal properly directed is a great virtue and commendable. However, misdirected fervor and devotion can be dangerous and deadly as we have seen so many times throughout history.

We are living at a time when true believers in Jesus Christ must have a bold zeal for the Lord and His revealed truth in Scripture.

Jude 3 states:

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

1 Peter 3:15 says to:

sanctify [set apart] Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

My prayer is that you will earnestly study the scriptures daily, grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, walk in obedience to God's Word and Spirit, accurately proclaim Scripture, and courageously stand for the truth. As we seek to faithfully and wholeheartedly serve the Lord with similar zeal as Joshua, let us always be reminded of God's command and promise to him:

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:8-9).

For More Information

Bill Rudge has produced numerous books, pamphlets and audio messages on a variety of timely topics. For a complete listing or a copy of his informative newsletter, visit www.billrudge.org or write to:

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